

## TWO PIECES OF SILVER.

## How They Saved the Life of a Mine Manager.

"Muerte a los gringos!"

Black Rosa's small, angular form shook with rage. Her black face grew blacker than its natural hue, if that were possible. Trembling in every nerve, she glared viciously, and shook a long, bony finger in the faces of the group of miners who with jests and jeers had met her supplications for charity.

"Get out of this, you black devil!" one shouted. "We have had enough of you."

"She's got plenty of money," cried another.

"Wears diamonds in the city," sneered a third.

"Get out! No beggars allowed!" they all shouted.

"Muerte a los gringos!" repeated the woman, with a shriek which would have chilled the blood of men unused to her vicious ways.

Manager France, of the Bull Domingo, heard the disturbance between the miners and the miserable old woman as he came up the gulch.

"Here, my good woman," said he, "here are two silver dollars. You had better not stay around here," he added, kindly, as she took the money and called the blessings of the saints upon his generous soul. "The men are not used to giving alms, and they will only treat you unkindly."

"He'd better be savin' them two dollars to help out the payroll of the Bull Domingo who has been keeping a slate for nearly three months for the accommodation of workmen on that property."

Senora Rosalina Ortiz once enjoyed a happy home in the City of Mexico, her birthplace. She had all the opportunities of education, both in Spanish and English, and in her early married life had traveled much. But misfortune came to her in the death of her husband and two of their three children, after the loss of all the property they possessed. They had for several years made their home in the United States, where Senor Ortiz had died, leaving his widow penniless. Poverty and sin were her undoing, and when the Colorado mining fever filled the mountains with fortune seekers of high and low degree Senora Ortiz drifted to Durango. She had sunk so low in vice and crime that she was accounted well fitted for anything from begging to petty thieving, even to the cutting of a throat.

She was living as his mistress with a hardened character known as "Robber Dan," an American, whose life both in and out of the penitentiary was a series of misdeeds. He had earned his title as she had earned hers. They were well matched in their criminal careers, although the woman had thus far known no more of prison life than is afforded by county jails. Her only child, a boy of twelve years, had, like his mother, become a professional beggar and thief.

The ill treatment she had received at the hands and tongues of the miners at Rico had burned into her soul like a hot iron, though the wound was largely healed by the soft words and the silver so kindly bestowed by John France. But, since she was not likely ever to be able to carry out her threat of death to all save her own race and equally incapacitated to insure the blessings of the saints which she had invoked, neither her curses nor her prayers were heeded. However, none who knew her had any faith in Black Rosa's possession of goodwill toward any one of American or European blood.

Even Robber Dan and his male companions in crime—who formed the most notorious and daring band of robbers in southern Colorado—did not escape the vindictive spirit of Black Rosa. But the woman was useful to them, and when plentifully supplied with drink there was no crime too black for her wicked heart nor scheme too deep for her cunning brain. If she possessed a single redeeming trait no one had been able to discover it.

Durango had been ablaze with the glory of frontier life—a glory which comes but once in the lifetime of a new town. But there was then little regard felt for the future by the fortune hunters who swarmed the streets and filled up the hotels and held high revelry in the saloons and dance halls of that camp.

Honest men with capital, seeking to double their investments in a fortnight, stood on the same level of association with the horse thief and the road agent. Mine promoters and gamblers drank over the same bar. The crack of the stage driver's whip was but the echo of the pistol shot. Business conversations and ribald songs, laughter and curses intermingled in a wild hurrah chorus.

"Going back to the mine in the morning?" asked the clerk of the hotel a minute later, as France approached the desk and asked for writing material.

"Yes, sure!"

"Stage leaves at two o'clock."

"Well, call me a half hour earlier, and don't, for your head, let me miss the stage. I must be at the mine tomorrow by all means. By the way, I have lost a white silk handkerchief with a black border. Look out for it."

A few minutes later, while France was still busy writing, Sheriff Barney approached him and presented a little Mexican chap in whose possession had been found the silk handkerchief.

"What shall I do with him?" asked the sheriff.

"Look him up," said the manager of the Bull Domingo hotel, "look him up! That is the little rascal who came to me a few minutes ago begging for money. I gave him two bits and he shows his gratitude by stealing my handkerchief."

The attention of the loungers about the hotel office was attracted by these loudly spoken words of John France; but they did not hear what he said in a hurried undertone to the sheriff, so

there was a murmur of indignation against the man who would seek the punishment of a child for stealing a silk handkerchief—and that after it had been returned.

John France laughed and went to his room, while the sheriff smiled, as he always smiled in danger and out, and led the boy away. The crowd looked puzzled.

"He had my boy locked up, did he?" shrieked Black Rosa, when the details of this little episode were related to her. The black face of the little Mexican woman seemed ablaze with indignation. "He shall pay for this!"

"Senora forgets the two silver dollars," taunted Robber Dan; "I thought the senora might feel sorry that we had planned to rob this fine Americano. But it's all right now—is it, dearest?" he added, mockingly.

"Rob him! murder him!" yelled Black Rosa, and she staggered from her chair, as if she would carry out her own command, but fell on the floor in a heap.

Dan and his pals lifted the woman to a bed, and the leader remarked that she would sleep till morning, and be neither help nor hindrance. It had been known for twenty-four hours that the money—some ten thousand dollars—for the Bull Domingo pay roll had been received, but until announced by Manager France it was not known when that gentleman would start for the mine.

At twelve o'clock that night four men, heavily armed, rode out of Durango.

Two hours later the stage followed them, with one occupant on the inside and the driver alone on the front boot. Bloomer, the driver, might as well have been unaccompanied so far as the inside occupant of the coach was concerned. But he was used to these lonely rides, and when a passenger preferred to be exclusive it simply exhibited to Bloomer the poor taste of the passenger. So he talked to his horses and sang to them and passed the lonely hours as comfortably as if he had been surrounded by a half dozen passengers, and soon forgot the fellow on the inside.

Coming to a bend in the road, where the ascent of the first steep mountain is begun, Bloomer fell into a reflective mood and remarked to the night wheeler that the fellow on the inside might possibly "rise to an appreciation of the society of a stage driver and his horses if the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun should happen to appear at the window of the coach."

Of course Bloomer was not really expecting such a surprise for his unsociable passenger; so when the shotgun appeared, with three others, and accompanied by an order to "throw down them ribbons and throw up them hands," he was himself so completely surprised that he obeyed without a word of protest.

If he was surprised at this sudden appearance of road agents, he was really dumfounded at what followed. For five minutes there was a rattle of shotguns as if a miniature battle were